

Umawali. Hohodene myths of the Anaconda, father of the fish

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Introduction

Two quite novel approaches to the interpretation of South American mythologies have appeared in recent years which are directly relevant to the study of mythic speech or discourse. The first is Lawrence SULLIVAN's magnificent study *Icanchu's Drum: an orientation to Meaning in South American Religions*; the second, HILL's collection of essays *Rethinking History and Myth: Indigenous South American Perspectives on the Past*. Both published in 1988, they are actually quite different in their scope and intent.

SULLIVAN, an historian of religions, provides a panorama of Native South American religious ideas but without trying to describe exhaustively the religious life of any single people. His effort is to construct a morphology — that is, an order of forms — of South American religious life. The result is astonishing both in its comprehensiveness and its penetrating insight into the fundamental concerns of the religious imagination of South American peoples. It is a compelling demonstration of the potential for combining hermeneutics, historical understanding, and comparative method. In this sense, *Icanchu's Drum* offers the first treatment of South American myth as religious imagination.

Myth not only shapes and explains social, economic, and political orders but, above all, it reveals the imagination itself, the human ability to draw together disparate experiences into one imagic reality, a world of relations, apprehension, emotion, speculations, reproduction and judgment. (SULLIVAN 1988:18)

More explicitly,

Myth is the imagination beholding its own reality and plumbing the source of its own creativity as it relates to creativity in every form (plant and planting life, animal fertility, intelligence and art). Myth reveals the sacred foundations and religious character of the imagination. Mythic symbols signify the possibility, variety and meaning of cultural imagery. Myths are paradigmatic expressions of human culture; as significations that reveal the nature of significance, they make effective metastatements about imaginal existence (*ibid.*).

The bewildering array of images displayed by Sullivan's morphology is intended to develop a posture for more sustained reflections on cultural particulars. It is certainly possible and indeed quite fruitful to understand such forms and categories of myth in a

single culture, as we have tried to show in our recent study of shamanism in the Northwest Amazon (1992). Here, we seek to continue this exploration of the religious imagination of a culture through our interpretation of its myths of the Anaconda and water spirits.

HILL's collection, on the other hand, develops from a more restricted concern in anthropology for rethinking "the analytic distinction between myth and history by exploring indigenous South American narrative, ritual and oratory as ways of formulating and interpreting the history of Indian-White contact" (HILL 1988:1). Situated within a tradition of anthropological thinking on the relation of the discipline to historical questions, the collection proposes to consider history and myth as "modes of social consciousness through which people construct shared interpretive frameworks" (*ibid.*:5). While affirming the complementarity of the "modes", the volume nevertheless explores the utility of analytically distinguishing them "according to the different weighting each gives to the relation between structure and agency" (*ibid.*). Such a distinction permits the analyst to examine the interrelations of types of narrative genres, or "how these types of social consciousness are differentiated into genres of narrative and non-narrative activity and how they are articulated into mythic-historical genres where the two types of consciousness are merged" (*ibid.*:9). Genre analysis is the principal concern of a number of the essays in the collection. The transformation of myth into history is expressed by the creation of "novel semantic categories", through such tropes as irony and metonymy.

CHERNELA, for example, analyzes the Unurato anaconda myth among the Tukano-speaking Arapáço people of the Northwest Amazon. She purports to show how a "novel semantic category" encompassing non-native technology of the Whites is generated from the indigenous "metaphor" of sexual intercourse between an anaconda-ancestor and a human woman, and their socially charged relation to the betrayed husband, who kills the anaconda with a blowgun. The indigenous relation "wronged husband kills wife's lover with blowgun dart" is transformed in the course of the myth into a novel semantic category that both makes sense out of the white man's technology, and serves as a symbolic strategy for coping with historical realities of contact and domination.

The Hohodene Indians, an Arawak-speaking people of the Northwest Amazon and neighbors of the Tukanoans, tell a very similar myth of the anaconda *Umawali*, or *Uliamali*, who, as a white man, has

sexual relations with a woman and is killed by her husband with a blowgun. My interpretation of this myth shows that, for the Hohodene, the myth forms an integral part of a discourse on social reproduction. The *context* of this discourse does not refer to the history of Indian-White relations, but rather to the process of procreation and the various elements and relations implicit in this process: gender, exchange, affinity and consanguinity, the water-spirits as metaphors of sexuality. By extracting this discourse from its context, one runs the risk of misinterpreting both the narrative's content and its "use" in constructing a specific set of relations in procreation. Even such readings as "wronged husband", "illicit sexual union" (CHERNELA 1988:44) are problematic when the myth is interpreted within its rightful context.

The argument I develop in this paper consists of four main parts: the first gives an ethnographic sketch of the Hohodene Indians, with whom I have conducted fieldwork and about whom I have undertaken historical research since 1976. The sketch is intended to describe briefly their social, economic, political, and religious organization, as well as the history of contact and relations to the Whites. It provides information necessary to understanding the myths to be interpreted in Parts 3-4.

Parts 2 seeks to characterize the corpus of Hohodene mythology as a set of three main cycles referring to phases of cosmic history, from the primordial world to the first human ancestors. Each phase is unique in its dynamic, qualities, and central characters allowing us to understand the corpus as a sequential development. I discuss the relation of myth to ritual, myth to oral history, and the central importance of religious specialists to these relations. From this discussion, we are able to place the myths of *Umawali*, the Anaconda, within the second phase of cosmic history, which is most related to the theme of social reproduction; and within the context of post-birth shamanizing rituals. Yet, there are details of the myth which demand explanation: the Anaconda is a White man; how are we to understand this within its context?

Part 3 consists of a translation of a myth of the Anaconda, keeping as much as possible the original expressions, breaking up of lines — in short, poetic form — of the original narrative. In the Appendix, I provide somewhat freer translations of other myths in which the Anaconda *Umawali* is an important figure.

In Part 4, I interpret the myth first by dividing it, according to internal cues, into episodes and then, considering each episode in turn in terms of its contents, symbolic referents to gender and social relations, spatial and temporal dimensions, and similar patterns in other myths of the Anaconda. Of fundamental importance to the interpretation is the link which can clearly be drawn with rituals of exchange, or *pudali*, which in fact are central to the process of social reproduction in marital exchange. This is the social context for which the myth reveals its sacred foundations and religious character.

Finally, in the Conclusion, I draw attention to the principal methodological and substantive questions which have guided the interpretation.

The Hohodene

The Hohodene are a phratry of the Baniwa Indians, an Arawak-speaking population of the frontier borders between Brazil, Colombia and Venezuela. Numbering about 600, the Hohodene are largely concentrated on the Aiary River, tributary of the Içana in Brazil. To their immediate south and west are Tukano-speaking peoples (Uanano, Cubeo) of the Uaupés and Querary rivers with whom they maintain relations of alliance and exchange. The area of the Aiary, Querary and upper Uaupés is one of intense cultural exchange such that one finds numerous elements of Tukanoan culture intermingled with Arawakan. In fact, the Hohodene share most of the characteristics of their ways of life with the rest of the Northwest Amazon people, although culturally they have far more in common with other Arawak than with the Tukanoans.

Horticulture and fishing are their most important subsistence activities, which are supplemented by seasonal hunting and gathering of wild forest products. Both fishing and agricultural cycles are synchronized with a variety of natural indicators and mythical calendars linked to a series of important ritual activities. The division of labor between the sexes is one of interdependence and complementarity between male and female roles. Men cut and burn gardens while women harvest, replant and process manioc and other plants. Both men and woman fish, but men fish more often while women process their catch.

Traditionally, Hohodene settlements were large, rectangular long houses built near the banks of the major rivers and streams, or at the headwaters of small streams, or on the banks of lakes and ponds. According to their traditions, the Hohodene ancestors first occupied a hilltop somewhere on the upper Uaraná stream, a tributary of the upper Aiary. They did not use canoes, nor did they fish; they "obtained" fish from the Dzauinai, a Baniwa phratry of the mid-Içana River. Fishing has nevertheless become as integral a part of their way of life as agriculture.

It is perfectly consistent with the notion of the acquisition of fish that canoes were also "obtained", but this time from the Whites, along with other items of commerce in their early contact history when various Baniwa phratries agreed to end their war-making and settle on the main riverbanks. At that time, their orientation to the rivers, and hence access to Western goods, would have assumed greater importance. We shall see later on that these notions become linked to the mythological figure of the Anaconda, *Umawali*, who is the "Father of the Fish", is a White man, or gives rise to the White man in possession of material wealth.

Baniwa society is comprised of some six exogamous phratries, each consisting of 4-5 patrilineal sibs ranked according to the order of emergence of mythical ancestral brothers. Like their Tukanoan neighbors, sibs were once categorized (the systems has suffered numerous changes due to a situation of permanent contact) according to a system of ritual roles as chiefs (*enawinai*), shamans, warriors, dancers, and servants (*makuperi*). The Hohodene consider themselves the "middle" group (i.e.,

warriors) of five sibs which, today, are dispersed over a large area although in the past they may have been more geographically concentrated.

The core of local communities is the male sibling group and, as on the phratic end sib level, male sibling ties form the basis of a system of hierarchical rank according to relative age. Traditionally, the agnatic sibling group of a community constituted the most important level of decision-making.

Leadership is often exercised by the eldest brother of the local group. Oral histories indicate that warfare was an important dynamic in socio-political relations with Tukanoan and Maku peoples of the Uaupés, and that war chiefs frequently organized communities of younger-brother warrior sibs to conduct campaigns for the purposes of undertaking vengeance and capturing women and children. Warfare also has a fundamental importance in mythology.

Marriage rules prescribe phratic exogamy and a preference is expressed for marriage with cross-cousins. Direct sister-exchange is often practiced between preferred affinal lineages and sibs and, in some cases, preference is expressed for marriages between people from equivalently-ranked sibs of different phratries. Patri-virilocality is the dominant residence pattern; however, groom service gives rise to temporary, and sometimes permanent, uxorilocality. Marriage is generally monogamous (polygyny is nevertheless a part of their tradition) and involves a complex process of negotiation conducted by the fathers of the prospective couple during a series of exchange-festivals, or *pudali* (*dabukuri* in *lingua geral*). Until the birth of the first child, marriages are tenuous and can easily be undone. A woman, for example, may provoke a separation by refusing her husband's sexual advances or by not working in the garden, not cooking, etc., until her husband decides to take her back to her family, under whatever pretext. If no reconciliation is possible, the couple simply forget the marriage (the man "throws" the woman out). If sterility is in question, the procedures are usually more formal but most separations take place through a progressive abandoning or forgetting of the marriage.

Traditional religious life was based largely on the rituals and beliefs related to the sacred flutes and trumpets, *Kuwai*, representing the first ancestors of the phratries; the importance of the religious specialists, the shamans and chanters; and on the complex cycle of dance-festivals associated with seasonal activities. Central religious concerns and the extraordinary powers of religious specialists have been at the heart of millenarian and messianic movements among the Baniwa since the latter half of the 19th Century (WRIGHT 1981, 1989, 1992; WRIGHT and HILL 1986).

The Hohodene recall in detail the events of their first historical encounters with the Whites, and my interpretation of the oral histories (1981, 1989) and the written sources leads me to believe that these must have taken place in the late 18th Century. According to the Hohodene, these contacts were the result of a disastrous war expedition led by their elder sib brothers, the Molé-dakenai, on the Uaupés in which a white soldier's child was killed. A military force from the fort of São Gabriel da Cachoeira, at the mouth of

the Uaupés, was sent in reprisal which massacred the Molé-dakenai and took the Hohodene as prisoner to Barcellos, the seat of the Portuguese colony on the lower Rio Negro. After awhile, the Hohodene chief fled Barcellos but without his wife and sons (who eventually became soldiers, white people). He returned to the Içana and, after living in hiding for years, he eventually made an alliance with the Oalipere-dakenai, a Baniwa phratry of the Içana, marrying one of their women. The Oalipere-dakenai later requested land from the Hohodene since their own lands had been exhausted and they were on the verge of starvation. The Hohodene chief moved to the Aiary River and over various generations, the sib grew in number and prospered. Then a Baré Indian of the Uaupés, working for the Whites, attempted to persuade the Hohodene to descend the Rio Negro again for, he claimed, it was very "poor" on the Içana. The Hohodene held a meeting in which they decided that, in light of their memory of the Whites, and in view of their prosperity on the Aiary, most preferred not to follow the white man. The sib brothers then parted ways and resettled along the Aiary.

In the Hohodene view, then, their relations to the white man have been defined fundamentally by the questions of ethnic, political, and economic reproduction of their society. As an ethnic group, they were nearly "finished off" and saw their children transform into white soldiers. Through the decision of one chief, they were able eventually to recover their viability and create new alliances with the Oalipere-dakenai mutually beneficial to the reproduction of both groups. Politically the entire story develops out of a war. In Hohodene understanding, wars were traditionally undertaken in return for the loss of one of their number (WRIGHT 1990). Thus they understand that the Whites, having lost a child, returned the war leading to a massacre of their elder-brother sib and their forced descent to the Rio Negro. The Whites recovered their loss through the Hohodene children who stayed in Barcellos and became white soldiers. The Hohodene were only able to recover their losses through a re-arrangement of political alliances with other phratries. Finally, the economic reproduction of their society was called into question when a Baré (mestiço, white merchant) attempted to persuade them to relocate, claiming that it was "poor" on the Içana. In response, the Hohodene affirmed that their own work (houses and gardens) were sources of economic prosperity. Hence they adopted a strategy of political autonomy from the Whites in order to maintain the viability of their system. This stance has been reaffirmed on various occasions throughout their contact history.

Hohodene Mythology

Considered as a whole, Hohodene mythology can be internally differentiated into three major "cycles" — that is, sets of myths referring to different phases of cosmic history. Such differentiation is recognized by the Hohodene and is readily apparent in the nature and qualities of each phase. These cycles may be elaborated in different ways through a variety of

characters which vary among phratries, but the overall organization into major cycles appears to be the same.

The first cycle refers to a primordial world dominated by cannibalistic animal tribes who roamed the world incessantly killing and eating people. From this state of chaos, the creator/hero *Yaperikuli* (whose name means "he-inside-of-bone") emerged and seeks to restore order, taking vengeance against the animals asserting the superiority of order over chaos. *Yaperikuli's* struggles extend over a lengthy series of trials in which the Animals and Thunder, many of whom are *Yaperikuli's* affines, seek to destroy *Yaperikuli* and his brothers who nevertheless manages to outwit them. These myths may be seen to contain an extend discourse on the death and demise of the primordial world and the new order created from the vestiges of the old. The images of this primordial world confirm its violent and catastrophic nature in which the creation of order suffers the constant threat of being dismantled. The very beginning of the cosmos is a state of dismemberment, of awesome and devastating events. Such a condition was never totally eliminated, for the new order created contains elements of the old (fish-poison plants, poisonous substances used in witchcraft, etc.). *Yaperikuli* never got completely rid of the forces of chaos represented by the Animals and Thunder. Yet the primordial world was doomed to demise, caught up in endless cycles of vengeance and destruction. It was a world incapable of reproducing itself, lacking in both spatial and temporal continuity.

The second cycle marks a transition to a more dynamic past in which *Yaperikuli* created the conditions through which people reproduce the social order in birth, initiations and death. The principal myth which explains this is *Kuwai*, the child of *Yaperikuli* and the first woman *Amaru*. It is a modal myth in that it is told to explain a variety of fundamental questions concerning the nature of the world: how the order and ways of life of the ancestors are reproduced for all future generations (*walimani*, "those who will be born"); how children should be taught the nature of the world in rituals of initiation; how sickness and misfortune came into the world; and what are the relations among human beings, the spirits, and animals which is the legacy of the primordial world. In one sense, *Kuwai* embodies attributes of the primordial world, yet he goes beyond it for, through his powerful sounds (music), he makes the world open up to its present-day size and his body contains all its elements. From his body emerged the sacred flutes and trumpets which the Hohodene today continue to use in initiating their children, thereby reproducing the ways of the ancestors for future generations. In contrast to the closed, miniature, primordial world, the world created by *Kuwai's* music is constantly open to new meanings created by historical events. For this reason, the figure of *Kuwai* is associated with the white man and *Amaru*, the first woman, is considered the mother of the Whites (WRIGHT in press, 1993). According to shamans, *Kuwai* is both, of this (present-day) world and of the ancient (primordial) world; so that shamans seek to cure first in the ancient world, whereupon they may cure in

this world. Thus, the "mythic" world is the legitimate source for action in this world.

The third cycle is an elaboration of the second for, once the conditions of social reproduction have been created, *Yaperikuli* seeks to work out the details by which life and culture are sustained and renewed. The emergence of the first ancestors of humanity from the earth; the alternation of night and day; the growth and fertility of the earth for cultivation; cooking fire, etc. — all are instituted and given to humanity. The predominant theme in these myths is the differentiation and distribution of cultural elements among the peoples of the earth, each obtaining a share from the original source. The new order so created sustains humanity, defining a meaningful and symbolic order of the ways in which people may live and prosper in their daily lives. A number of local and phratry-specific myths then refer to the deeds of the first human ancestors, still "in the time of *Yaperikuli*", which give specific identity to the phratries (names, territories, sources of food).

In themselves, the myths explain (i.e., their cognitive function) what needs to be known about the universe. Yet they are not simply explanations, for a number of them (perhaps most) are directly connected to ritual practice. The myth of *Kuwai* is the clearest example: it is the model for initiation rituals performed today and, to a certain degree, for shamanic curing. In itself the myth legitimates the system of relations reproduced in these rituals. More importantly, through the performance of ritual chanting (*kalidzamai*), or protective shamanism in rites of passage, the creative acts of the mythic being of *Kuwai* become alive and are vested with a new and dynamic power. The rituals, in other words, are not merely the recreation of what was done in myth, but rather open the way to the construction of new meanings for their human participants.

By the same token, the myths — particularly of the second and third cycles — admit a certain reflexivity with events. Creation is not a closed account and the spirits of nature continue to affect humanity. The myths exercise a certain hegemony over events by providing a model for what humans are to do about them. In this sense, they may provide a source for political action. Thus, the story of the Hohodene ancestor cited above is thoroughly grounded in the cultural model of initiation of the *Kuwai* myth. Similarly, the messianic and millenarian movements of the 19th century were deeply rooted in the sacred model of individuality in the myths of *Yaperikuli* and *Kuwai* (WRIGHT 1989, 1992). Two of the most powerful and dangerous spirits of Hohodene mythology — *Kuwai* and the Anaconda *Umawali* — are associated with the white man, for which the myths explain how these powerful spirits are controlled and brought into society.

The privileged interlocutors in this reflexive process are the shamans, the legitimate sources of authority on questions of cosmic processes and myth. Their powers, that is esoteric knowledge of, and access to sources of creation far surpass those of non-specialists. This puts them in a privileged position to confirm or reject interpretations of events through myth and, beyond this, to intercede on

behalf of human interests, to announce the message of the divine, and thus to influence the course of events. The prophetic figures in Baniwa history have invariably had direct access to the most ancient and hidden sources of creative power that gave rise to order in the universe (WRIGHT 1992).

Unlike their Tukanoan neighbors, the Hohodene (and more generally, the Baniwa) ancestors of humanity do *not* come into being through the ancestral anaconda canoes swimming upriver and depositing ancestral sibs in determined places. For the Hohodene, the anaconda *Umawali* is known as "the father of the fish", in the generic sense that *Yaperikuli* is known as the "father of the Baniwa". *Umawali* refers to a single being, but he commands a legion of water-spirits collectively known as *umawalinai* (-nai, collective animate being) which may give sickness to humans particularly at childbirth. On such occasions, specialists must sing lengthy chants (*kalidzamai*) to neutralize the potentially harmful effects of eating fish. Once these chants have been performed, the diet of the natal family returns to normal. If they are not performed, the family runs the risk of a wasting sickness (*ifiukali*) in which it is believed that the fish consumed transforms into a snake in the bellies of the victims.

The myths of *Umawali* are, for the most part, related to a specific context, the rituals of post-birth seclusion when chanters shamanize the food of the natal family. Thus the myth transcribed below of the Anaconda *Umawali*, or *Uliamali* as he is called in this myth, and the first three texts in the Appendix, are normally told by chanters performing *kalidzamai*. The fourth text in the Appendix is told in the context of shamanic curing of witchcraft victims. All are thus related to shamanic powers.

The figure of *Umawali*, like *Kuwai*, is one of the few characters consistently associated with the white man. The fourth text in the Appendix states that the white man was made from the rotting corpse of the slain Anaconda and becomes the owner of the shotgun. The myth of *Uliamali* has the Anaconda, a White man, engaged in sexual relations with *Yaperikuli*'s wife. Thus the myths of *Umawali* would logically belong to the second phase of cosmic history and related to the theme of social reproduction. Yet, how are these themes treated? How are the myths related to their social and historical context? Our interpretation seeks to address these questions.

The Myth of Uliamali

Episode 1

- 1 They went walking on the riverbank
Two boys, *Dapaada*, were shooting fish
They walked on the riverbank
They shot them
- 5 The sun was high when *Yaperikuli* descended
"What are you doing?" he said
"We are shooting fish, so well our arrows shoot"
"Do they kill?" "They are our fish-killing arrows"
"Let me try"
- 10 He took the arrows and shot
He broke them
Dálehe ... dálehe
"Puh, you know nothing *Yaperiku*
"Being *Yaperikuli* you know the world,
- 15 "Yet *Uliamali* is fucking your wife,
" *Uliamali* is fucking your wife."
" *Uliamali* is fucking my wife?!"
"Yes" "Where?" "There at the port, where she went"
"Oh, I will fix the arrows" He fixes their arrows
- 20 "When does it happen?" "When she comes back from
the garden, in the early afternoon" "I'll take care of it"
She came home, squeezed manioc, and descended to
the port
She took an earthenpot and a large gourd
And sat on the top of a rock and called him
Then came *Umawali*, *Uliamali*,
One and the same
- 25 *Hutsu*¹
Out comes a white man, it was *Umawali*
They lay together as *Yaperikuli* watched
Then *Yaperikuli* went back home

Episode 2

- On ... *Yaperikuli* calls *Huiniri*²
- 30 "Tomorrow it will be",
Yaperikuli says. "Ho"
He went
The next day, she went to the garden and later came
back home
- 35 She took the earthenpot and a large gourd
Yaperikuli and *Huiniri* sneak up and climb on top of a rock
There they stay
Yaperikuli and *Huiniri* with him, the two of them
They took their blowguns
- 40 They made darts
Huiniri
She came to the port
And struck the gourd — "too too too to" — *Putsa*
tsalalala ...
Out comes one and the same, tain
- 45 She laid down... and waited
They got their blowguns ready
A white man it was
He was already climbing on her
"Now, blow your gun *Yaperikuli*", *Huiniri* said. "Ho"

¹ The narrator explained, first appeared a log (*tupé*) which opened and out came *Uliamali*.

² *Huiniri*, a forest-spirit, owner of the blowgun.

- 50 *Puh* — he missed. "Dzzeh ! You know nothing *Yaperikuli*, not like so do they kill people
"Like so they kill people", said this *Huiniri*
"Now,
"Let's blow to kill". They would kill
They blew —*pa' TAH* !³
- 55 *Taa* ! On the sky *Tain* !
Behold the darts came back as spirit-darts, *walama Ffiuhh* !
That's all, it killed there
TA !
- 60 *TA* ! On his arse, *Yaperikuli* had killed
Uliamali sank to the bottom, *buuuh*
He turned over and let out his sperm
Which floated up and stayed on the river
Yaperikuli and *Huiniri* went back home
- 65 And acted as if nothing had happened
She saw their arrows drying in the house.

Episode 3

- Then later,
They tell their younger brother *Kuwaikaniri*
"Go fish —
- 70 "Go catch fish for us to eat", he said, "go catch fish for us to eat" "*Ho*"
Yaperikuli gave him a fishpole and bait
"Your fishpole" "*Ho*"
Kuwaikaniri went down to catch fish
All little fish
- 75 A little red one he catches, *tsak* !
[called] *rutan*
He casts the fishpole head
[and catches] a small *duidali*. In a stream, another we know as *matipara*
- 80 In a fish-trap, *tsak* ! A little *kufiro*
Four
That's all⁴
Then he killed and took the fish back
To eat, for them to eat, only them
- 85 They divided up his share
Yaperikuli had one share
Huiniri had one share
Kuwaikaniri divided up another. altogether
- 90 For her they set aside four little fish to eat
Then,
She went and gathered manioc
When done, she got water and firewood
She came back and lit the fire in the earth-oven, in the earth-oven
- 95 She made manioc bread
Fiercely the fire burns
"Roast them well, woman", he says,
"Let the fire burn well,
"Roast them well."
- 100 "You give me to eat also", she says,
"It seems that you don't like me", she says.
"Hey, they'll still be alive when I put them to eat", he says,
"Roast our food well".
They roasted
- 105 Well
Then she comes to get her share
He puts it for her
Four pieces
"Here is yours" "*Ho*"
- 110 She takes it and sits down to eat
Yaperikuli joins together
Their shares
Yaperikuli's
Huiniri's

- 115 *Kuwaikaniri's*
They turn around and eat together
They finish eating
And then
They run out and shout,
- 120 "*Paaah* !
"If *Uliamali's* penis is tasty, eat your husband's penis," *Yaperikuli* says
"Your husband's penis is tasty to eat", he says.
Faugh ! Angry was she the woman
They laughed, "*Heh heh heh*"
- 125 She heard what they said
She got an earthenpot and a gourd
And went to the port
She drank water
And vomited — *tsak* !
- 130 Out came the *matipara*
Tsak, *duidali* fell out
Out came the *rutan* and fell
Only one then, the *kufiro*, wouldn't come out
So it was *Uliamali's* sperm fell in her belly
- 135 And it grew inside her...
HUGE was *Umawali* in her belly ! This *Uliamali*

Episode 4

- And so,
Yaperikuli left it like so with her
He abandoned her
- 140 Until... huge, she carried *Umawali*
Uliamali went and looked for food with her
A tree-fruit,
Another tree-fruit,
Another tree-fruit...
- 145 So it went
One day she left him
He called her
He looked for her and she wasn't there
For then, she got under a large earthen container, she got inside and hid
- 150 *Umawali* flew and fell, *tik* !
On the longhouse roof
She wasn't there !
He got together black ants
They looked for her and beat the container
- 155 They looked for her the mother
"*Tsk* ! *Aaah* what a noise you make !"
They opened up the leaf covering where she, the mother, was
She came out, "Go away, *aaah*, how he looks for me that one !" She ran *khelililililil... tih* ! In the river
His mother became the *mápara* fish
- 160 The *mápara*
For thus they made her the *mápara*
Uliamali's mother.
Then,
He didn't rest
- 165 He went and climbed up trees
Umawali climbed up
He ate with his mother, *seringa* fruits, all kinds of fruits
They come back and look for others
They came to a *cunuli* fruit-tree⁵

³ Other narrators give this action as: they slap the palms of their hands on the mouths of the blowguns and the arrows shoot out and up to the point of the sky.

⁴ The narrator explained, these four fish are the transformed sperm of *Uliamali*.

⁵ *Uliamali* was inside her belly all the time.

- 170 Far up to the top of the tree *Umawali* climbs up the tree
Tiiii [on top of the tree] he called, "Mother, mother:
 mother, mother."
 She sat inside a hole at the bottom of the tree
 He took a little fruit
- 175 And spit out its seed... his tail stayed in her vagina
 She gives him a very red fruit, he turns around and spits
 out its seed
 Then the little frog *manáde* appears
 She calls it [and tells it to stay in her place]⁶
 "Ho"
- 180 She quickly escaped to the river
 He looks for her [stretching to the top of the cunul] and
 sees her rowing away
 His mother, "Hey hey" [he looks at the frog] It's not his

- mother ! She'd gone ! "Aaaagh !"
 Tk... tk *Umawali*, *Uliamali* runs after her tk... tk
 Angrily he went
- 185 *Tiiii*... he falls in the river
 So it was then,
 They left for him things to kill him
 Things to kill him, whatever, they left for him, such as
 piranha grandfather, *Umawali*
 He swam but they caught him *tsak* ! This *Uliamali*
- 190 They came back *tih* !
 And so they killed him
 She, the mother
 Sank to the bottom
 Bees descended on his head
 That's the end of this story.

Interpretation

On the basis of internal cues (time breaks; major shifts of scenes and characters; and plot development) the myth can be divided into four episodes. As will be seen, these correspond to distinguishable phases in the process of procreation to which the whole myth evidently refers. Given the fact that it is told in post-birth ritual chanting, one would expect that the myth creates the essential forms through which this process is mediated.

It is thus insufficient to say that the "problem" of the myth is a "moral one", as CHERNELA (1988) has argued in interpreting the very similar myth of *Unurato* among the Arapaço. On a superficial level, one might read it as a vengeance of a cuckolded husband against his wife. Yet this interpretation fails to account for both the structure and the content of each episode, as well as ignoring its contextual meaning in shamanistic ritual.

To begin, in episode 1 (lines 1- 27), it is essential to understand the relation of the woman to the Anaconda/white man. In Baniwa thought, fish, aquatic animals, and waterspirits are believed to have the greatest number of relations with female sexuality and fecundity. Aliments affecting female sexual reproduction are attributed to the action of water-spirits. Congenital malformations and accidents in childbearing are also attributed to them. Fish are the object of the principal food restrictions of menstruating women and in post-birth seclusion. A woman who does not respect this precaution would suffer prolonged and painful hemorrhage. By contrast, neither the time between menstrual periods nor that of gestation are subject to such restrictions.

This alternation between periods with and without fish is correlated with two other domains of behavior: sexual relations — abstinence during menstrual periods and frequent sexual relations during gestation (for the well-being of the child to be born); and work in the gardens — menstruating women do not work in the gardens nor prepare manioc beer. In contrast, non-menstruating women are considered "active" through their work in the gardens and preparation of manioc (JOURNET 1988: 353-5).

Thus, quite clearly we have in episode 1 the image of a sexually active woman in relation to a spirit of the waters, *Uliamali*. Further, her relations with the anaconda occur precisely after she returns from the garden and descends to the river where, with a large gourd and earthenpot (both are spirit-calling instruments), she calls the spirit to come have sex with her. The problem seems to be, what tensions in marital relations does this generate and what is to be done about them ?

In contrast to the woman, the figure of *Yaperikuli* is cast as a hunter, yet a very poor one for in his effort to shoot fish, he breaks two arrows and in fact, the two young boys are better hunters than he. This is consistent with other Baniwa myths in which *Yaperikuli* is portrayed as the ancestor of hunting and fishing but again, as a poor hunter and fisher. In the myth of *Iniriferi*, for example (see second myth of Appendix), *Yaperikuli* uses the child of one of his companions to trap fish by attracting them with the blood from a wound on the boy's leg. But, instead of stopping once he'd obtained sufficient fish, he lets himself be carried away by his desire to kill and provokes the vengeance of the spirit of the waters. The child is carried away by a traíra, a carnivorous fish. Thus begins a long pursuit over the course of which *Yaperikuli* creates natural obstacles, the rapids, that retain larger fish downstream. At the end of the pursuit, *Yaperikuli* makes an enormous fish-trap and sends the *Baré* Indians to kill the water monster, who is also *Umawali*, ancestor of carnivorous fish. The myth ends by the traíra being cut up and the pieces thrown downriver where they give rise to various species of water-animals. In this myth, as in the *Uliamali* myth, men and the water-spirits become mortal enemies. Fishing and war are thus similar: men are at war against the carnivorous animals, incarnation of the spirits of the waters, which can be killed with the same weapons used in wars (arrows and blowguns; see also the fourth myth in the Appendix). Yet fishing and war have different goals: one revolves around the regulated satisfaction of the hunter and fisher, the other around the destruction of the enemy.

⁶ The frog sings, "mãe, mãe" ("mother, mother").

These themes are further developed in episodes 2 and 3 of the myth.

There are many possible explanations for the association of the Anaconda and the white man. In actuality, the Whites have often taken Baniwa women for concubines but haven't given their daughters in exchange. In oral histories, the Whites have clearly been responsible for the disruption of Baniwa families. It is against the Whites that the Baniwa have been in a long and continuous struggle, including war. Whites are on the periphery of humanity and, like predatory animals and spirits, give sickness and cause death. *Umawali* changes his skin, like a shirt (*likamitsa*, see the first myth in the Appendix), as the Whites wear clothes. *Umawali* is believed to be the source of an enormous variety of fish, as the Whites produce an impressive quantity of manufactured objects. For these reasons, one would expect a marked ambivalence towards the anaconda for which the myth would provide some resolution.

Finally, in episode 1, the dimensions of space and time are introduced along horizontal and vertical axes respectively. As in other Hohodene myths, these dimensions signify, on the one hand, relations of exchange with other groups (i.e. affinal, spirits, etc., in the horizontal dimension) and generational time, the growth and passage from state to state or cycle to cycle of repetitive social processes (in the vertical dimension). In the first episode, the horizontal axis is marked by separation between husband and wife in which the woman is on the side of the spirits of the water and the husband is cast in the role of fisher. The vertical dimension, of generational time, is represented by *Yaperikuli*'s relation to the two young boys (adult/children), yet the normal, hierarchical relation is curiously inverted as the boys are superior fishers and "know" more than the adult *Yaperikuli*. This suggests that a transition is being made in the relation of adults to children which would be characteristic of the beginning of a natal family.

What links this situation with the following episode are the two arrows, which *Yaperikuli* "fixes" and which he will use to "kill" (i.e., control) the Anaconda and hence his wife's relation to the spirit-world as a sexually active female.

In episode 2 (lines 29-66), a new actor is introduced — *Huiniri*, a forest-spirit and master of the blowgun. His relationship of alliance to *Yaperikuli* marks a further differentiation within the natural world, for now the forest-spirits/hunters assist the men (fishers) in their war against the water-spirits. Implicitly, this differentiation strengthens the sexual separation of episode 1 for, in cosmic history, the forest-spirits are relatively "older" and more distant from humans than the water-spirits.

The killing of the Anaconda with the blowgun goes beyond the ordinary process of shooting fish. This is evident in the vertical connection made between sky (the arrows hit the tip of the sky) and river in which the hunting-arrows return to the earth as *walamas*, spirit-darts. The vertical dimension here would refer to the shamanistic "killing" of the water-spirits which must be done during the process of post-birth seclusion. Both the blowgun and the hunting-arrows are in fact invoked by the chanters of *kalidzamai* to "kill"

the water-spirits which may cause sickness to the mother and child. They are powerful weapons for their direct connection to *primordial* sources (the sky); hence the arrow has the sacred name of the Primal Sun's arrow (*likapichiriale Härn*)

Shamanizing action controls female sexuality by temporarily annulling the relation of the woman to the water-spirits. In the following episode, the woman's sexuality, along with the water-spirits (transformed into fish) are brought within the sphere of human society. The Anaconda shoots out its sperm which, like the arrows of episode 1, are left over to be incorporated into the dynamic of the myth's resolution.

Episode 3 can only be understood by realizing that it takes place within the context of a ritual exchange, the *pudali* festivals commonly celebrated in Northwest Amazon societies among affinal groups. In fact, one narrator of this myth explicitly structured this episode as the realization of a *pudali* in which the hosts — *Yaperikuli*, *Huiniri*, and *Kuwaikaniri* — offer the fish caught to affinal groups — the birds — along with manioc beer (compare the first myth in the Appendix where the main event is a *pudali* between *Yaperikuli* and his affine, the Anaconda *Umawali*). Once again, the horizontal dimension of exchange with others is central to the dynamic.

Initially, the men affirm their *unity* as a group of hunters (*Huiniri*), fishers (*Kuwaikaniri*), and warriors (*Yaperikuli*, the chief who orders his younger brother to kill fish) by catching four small fish to be given in exchange, and by separating their shares of the catch from the woman's. The four fish are the transformed sperm, or *likai*, of the Anaconda ("father of the fish") and represent masculine substance.

The woman, it should be noted, is still active in gathering and processing manioc. Manioc gardening and female sexuality are, as we have said, associated, and there is a further link to procreation in that the word for manioc, *kaini*, contains the root *kai-*, seminal substance. It can be demonstrated that, as with the Tukanoans (C. HUGH-JONES 1979), manioc gardening and processing are metaphoric of the procreation of children. The cooking of manioc bread (*péte*) would here be metaphoric of mature female sexuality.

Thus the men, internally differentiated by roles yet solidary as a group, stand in opposition to the women, although both are represented by substances — manioc and fish — which express complementarity in the procreation of children. Both substances are "cooked" (manioc bread and roasted fish) and exchanged, each giving to the other what they have caught or cultivated. The woman is greedy and desirous of the fish, and the men must restrain her urges lest she eats the fish alive.

Once the woman realizes the "trick" of having eaten the Anaconda's sperm, she rejects the food, becoming "angry" (meaning, she rejects sexual relations) and vomits 3 of the 4 fish (the 3 appears to refer to the 3 males as a solidary group, while the 1 fish which remains would refer to the other, affinal group). The one fish she is unable to get rid of, *kufiro*, is the one fish caught in a fish-trap, symbolizing the ritual restrictions she must now enter during the process of gestation and birth, the focus of the following episode.

The final episode completes the social construction of the procreative process: the myth has thus gone from marital relations and generational change (episode 1), to the complementary opposition of the sexes in procreation (episode 3), in order now to focus on mother/child relations. What remains from previous episode is the anaconda child, now inside the woman's belly. Whereas in episode 1, she "called" the Anaconda with a container, now she *is* the container for the child.

There are several possible ways of interpreting episode 4, each of which would make sense of its imagery within the context of procreation. No doubt the possibility of various interpretations, consistent among themselves, increases the power of the myth. The first of these is consistent with one of the principal stated concerns of the post-birth ritual chanting — to make food, particularly fish, safe for the natal family to eat, for if fish are not "killed" by shamanizing action, they would transform into snakes in the bellies, producing a wasting sickness called *ifiukali*. The Hohodene believe that, in reprisal for the predatory action of the men in fishing, the spirits of the waters affect people with sickness, especially the reproductive system of the women, and young children. Pregnant women are particularly susceptible to this. Hence, in episode 4, the woman bears *Uliamali* in her belly — constantly hungry and noisy — and is unable to get rid of him until an opportune moment. In reprisal for the men having hunted fish and her having eaten them, she suffers the sickness and eventually her child is devoured by predatory fish in return. Such an interpretation would partially account for the movement and transformations in the episode and would at least justify shamanistic action.

Consistent with the process of conception, the episode would also refer to gestation, and here we could distinguish two moments or states: the first moment (line 137-62) describes a pregnant woman in seclusion, restricted to a diet of forest-fruits which she eats with her child. She attempts to escape, shuts herself inside the house, and hides under an enormous earthen plate. She is thus doubly "contained" persecuted by her child who falls on top of the longhouse roof. The longhouse here would be symbolic of the womb. The ants who persecute her would refer to the diet of the woman in prebirth seclusion. In her transformation to the *mápara* fish, she crosses the boundaries between humanity and water-spirits: from a human mother bearing an anaconda child, she assumes the identity of the other, i.e., water-spirits.

In the second moment (lines 163-85), the anaconda ascends an enormous *cunurí* tree (*cunurí spruceana*), while keeping his tail within his mother's womb. The two exchange fruits, she giving him a very red, ripe fruit, and he spitting out its seed. It is enough to know that, for the Hohodene, sexual relations during pregnancy are believed to promote the growth of the child. Thus, the image here would be an analogy between human sexual relations and the fertilization of the *cunurí* palm tree (See G. REICHEL-DOLMATOFF 1989, for similar images in Tukanoan

mythology). In Hohodene myths, red fruits are associated with female sexuality (menstrual blood, for example), and here, the Anaconda spits out its seed (the word for seed is, again, *lika*). The extreme vertical dimension would indicate a connection of the woman and child to generational time. The final act, when the mother escapes to the river, would refer to the separation of mother from child at birth in which the child is "devoured" by the predatory fish and spirits of the waters.

A third and final interpretation would integrate this episode more firmly with episode 3 and the meaning of the myth as a whole. *Pudali* exchange cycles are in fact celebrated in two phases. Coordinate with affinal alliances, the cycle begins with a male-owned *pudali* in which a wife-giving group offers a large heap of smoked fish to a wife-taking group. In a female-owned *pudali* held several weeks later, the wife-taking group offers a large quantity of processed manioc pulp to wife-giving group.

In the first phase, the unity of the male group of hunters, fishers, and warriors is emphasized in opposition to the affinal group. This is the case in episode 3, as we saw. In the second phase, the celebrated figure and center of attention is the female owner of the ritual, while the unity of the male group takes on a secondary importance. Hence in episode 4, the men have no role, and the constant refrain is the anaconda's crying for its mother.

Within the "mother" figure is concentrated the symbolic unity, or complementarity, of the two substances distinguished in episode 3: processed manioc pulp and fish. The large earthen plate is a container of manioc pulp, and she transforms into the *mápara* fish. The woman's procreative role thus consists of both an internal connection to the domestic sphere, symbolized in the production of manioc inside the house, and an external connection to otherness, symbolized in her transformation into a mother of an other group, the fish. It is perhaps within this complementary opposition of the woman's position that we may understand the tension so powerfully portrayed in her wish to escape the anaconda-child.

The ecological coding of the myth supports this link to the second phase of *pudali* rituals: while episode 3 is a time of fish-trapping and manioc processing, episode 4 takes place in the time of fruit-gathering, the rainy season ripening of the *cunurí* fruit, when the *manáde* frog sings, indicating seasonal transition. In contrast to the horizontal relations of exchange with other groups emphasized in episode 3, here the vertical dimensions of internal unity of the group are expressed (see HILL 1984). The falling of the anaconda-child into the river would most likely refer to the falling of a constellation associated with the anaconda at the end of the rainy season. As a whole, in short, the myth expresses the entire cycle of manioc gardening (from cultivation to the final products), along with the fishing cycle (from the trapping of fish to their exchange) and the gathering of wild-fruits as correlates with the process of human biological and social reproduction.

Conclusion

My remarks here are both of a methodological and substantive nature. Two methodological guidelines have been essential to my interpretation of the myth: first, the systematic and intensive analysis of the single myth in terms of its logical structure, rhetorical devices, and symbolic content of the elements is, in my opinion, uniquely capable of revealing its meaning. As I have been at pains to point out, a superficial reading of the myth — as a story of a cuckolded husband who seeks vengeance against his wife by banishing her to nature — fails to understand its meaning, imputing a "morality" and an ideological content alien to its purpose. Through a systematic interpretation of the elements, such images as the Anaconda/white man, which "stand out" for discussions of myth and history, assume their rightful place and weight within a series of images and sequences of actions in the myth as a whole.

Second, the meaning of the myth and its explanatory power derive from its unique relation to the "context" (social, political, economic, religious) of procreation. As I have said, the myth is normally told as part of the ritual chanting performed by specialists following the birth of a child. There are undoubtedly other appropriate occasions — such as during *pudali* rituals. However, to read the myth independently of this context (a "context-free" analysis) would distort the relation of the myth's operations to the social processes of which they are an integral part. In effect, the myth's operations are, to cite TURNER (n.d.), "the inner, cultural forms of social processes formulated from the point of view of specific categories of social actors" (here, men and women). Thus, the subject of the myth is as much the subjectivity of the social actor as it is the social order conceived as a process of interaction. The question becomes "the nature of the subjective patterns in the myth and the role of myth as a device for inculcating such culturally stan-

dardized patterns of subjectivity" (*ibid.*). The myth *acts on* the social process of which it is a part; fundamental to this acting-on is the emotive force of the situations and symbols represented in the narrative.

Ecological, economic, social, biological, and ritual cycles together form the nexus of relations through which the narrative constructs its meaning. It explains the process of social reproduction (its cognitive function), at the same time realizes this process in ritual (its performative function), which ultimately shapes social experience (its deictic function, JACOPIN 1988). Through analogies with natural cycles, the cultural forms of the myth represent the process of transforming nature as a set of reproducible operations. The spatial and temporal dimensions, represented by the horizontal and vertical axes, are the means through which critical transformations are made in the social. The use of powerful emotions of ambivalence (inherent to the nature of sexuality), marital and procreative relationships, clothes the myth's logical operations in a language of images which produce its dramatic and forceful impact. The relations of the mytho-logic to sentiment are thus fundamental to the power of the myth and its ability to produce transformations in experience.

The myth's concern with forms of reproduction in Hohodene society also constitutes the basis for shaping relations to outsiders in historical situations of contact. Both the Anaconda and the white man are disruptive, external, and anti-social forces which, in the course of the myth, are eventually contained, controlled, brought within society, and reproduced within its own structure. The myth thus offers a "solution" to the white man, in much the same way as the *Kuwai* myth (see WRIGHT in press, 1993). In this sense, myth exercises a hegemony over the reality to which it refers.

Appendix: Hohodene Myths of Umawali and Other Water-spirits

Yaperikuli Kills Fish with Pepper

Yaperikuli took for his wife the daughter of Grandfather Piranha *Umaiferi*. She was *Umawali*'s kin (*thadua*), the fish-people's kin. *Yaperikuli* made rain fall and with it little fish (*khetu*). The birds ate the fish as they fell. *Yaperikuli* then went with his wife to her father's house. He greeted *Umaiferi* ("my grandfather" — "my grandson"), for he was a person. *Umaiferi* took off his red shirt (*likamitsa*) and became *Umawali*. *Umawali* then danced with his daughter. Her kin then arrived, one after another, and she greeted each one ("my elder brother, my kin"). *Umawali* danced in a circle around them. He gave them little fish to eat, two baskets of them. They danced around the fire. They saw him kill his children (the fish) for them to eat and they were satisfied.

When done, *Umawali* asked his daughter, "what does my daughter's husband eat?" "He eats fish", she replied. "So it is", *Umawali* replied taking a *makuperi* (servant). *Umawali* clubbed him, roasted him and gave the food, which had become a fish, to his daughter: "Eat, my daughter, show my daughter's husband." But the fish was still alive. She told *Yaperikuli* to give it to the birds for them to eat alive. The *unuli* bird went to eat greedily. Suddenly *Yaperikuli* trapped its chest and got pepper. He threw the pepper on the fish. Like an arrow, the pepper killed the fish and it became food. In the same way, chanters today kill fish when they do *kalidzamai*.

Yaperikuli Kills Iniriferi

On the upper Uaupés, near the Querary, lived *Iniriferi* the traíra. On the Querary lived *Häri* together with *Yaperikuli*. *Häri* had a great deal of luck in fishing, while *Yaperikuli* did not. One day *Häri* went to his garden, and *Yaperikuli* went fishing with *Häri's* son. *Yaperikuli* asked the boy, "how does your father kill so many fish?". The boy replied, "like me, I have a wound on my leg". *Häri's* son demonstrated by sitting on a *carainha* log over the river, taking off the bandage on his wound, and letting the blood-like matter fall in the water, whereupon the fish were attracted and he easily shot them. When they were ready to go back, along came *Iniriferi* and *Yaperikuli* was eager to shoot him. The waters of the river rose and *Iniriferi* sucked the boy into his mouth, but *Iniriferi* left the boy alive in his belly. *Yaperikuli* went to look for fish poison to kill *Iniriferi*, but the fish saw that he was about to kill him so he swam downriver. *Häri* joined *Yaperikuli* and took along a large pot to cook *Iniriferi*. At each rapids, going down the Uaupés, *Yaperikuli* made a trap but *Iniriferi* swam out to the other side of it. They got down to Parato-uitera and *Häri* told the Baré Indians to kill *Iniriferi* in return for having killed his son. Around São Gabriel they made a huge trap and the Baré left three birds to wait for *Iniriferi* as he entered the trap. The river rose up again as *Iniriferi* was forced into the trap; each of the birds sang as he entered. They killed him and cut him open but *Häri's* son was already dead rotten. They cut up *Iniriferi* and threw pieces of him downriver where they became large fish (pirarucu, taracaia, irara), the alligator, crocodile and turtle. They cut off his head and it became a rock (*Umawali hliwida*). Thus began fish at São Gabriel.

The Hohodene Ancestor *Kufali* Obtains Fish

(Hohodene traditions indicate several sources of ancestral fish (*uleiyainai*). One of the most important is the lake *Kuetan* on the Içana where the *Wadzulinai*, a Baniwa phratry, long ago left a canoe (*Kuyanali*, *Ukuman*) at the bottom of the lake and it miraculously filled up with all kinds of fish. Another source is the hilltop at Tunui on the mid-Içana, a place called *Häri-dawania*; a third, on the Cubete River, *Manude*. From these places, the phatries obtained their fish (i.e., the ancestors took shares to their houses). Thus the Hohodene ancestors of the Aiary obtained fish from the *Kadaupurithana*, a *Dzauinai* sib of the Içana.

At first the Hohodene ancestor *Kufali* lived on a hill where there was no fish. His wife, a *Kadaupurithana*, told him to get fish from her father. The *Kadaupurithana* ancestor *Kueyaweno* gave *Kufali* a small, sealed basket full of all fish and water animals, and told *Kufali* to open it only when he got back home. Midway back, *Kufali* stopped and rested, for the basket was extremely heavy. Curious to know what made it so heavy, *Kufali* opened the basket and out burst the fish which covered the trees like leaves. He gathered the leaves and returned home. He put the leaves inside a hollowed-out brazilwood log (*kereripe*) and a plantain trunk (*dereripe*) and set them in the river. They became fish canoes, like *Kuyanali*, and transformed into *Umawali*. Thus began fish for the Hohodene.

Kuwaikaniri Kills Umawali

Kuwaikaniri went to the Uaupés taking with him *caraiurú* dye, a *japurá* fruit, a shield and a blowgun. The *dukutchiali* bird sang (an omen), and *Yaperikuli* knew that *Kuwaikaniri* would die. The head of the Anaconda rose up and its tail struck *Kuwaikaniri* who fell, whole, in the Anaconda's belly. *Umawali* was killing *Kuwaikaniri*. He took his *caraiurú* and his *japurá*; he was rotting. He took his shield and blowgun and chanted until *Umawali* died. *Umawali* began to rot and his belly grew until *Kuwaikaniri* could cut it open. The Uainambí bird sang (an omen) and *Kuwaikaniri* began to return home to Hipana on the Aiary, stopping at numerous places along the way and eating sweet fruits. *Yaperukuli* was waiting for his return and had manioc beer prepared. When he arrived, *Yaperikuli* greeted him and said, "my brother, you have already passed into another life? What do you eat?" "Fish", *Kuwaikaniri* responded, for he had gotten rid of the poison the Anaconda had given him.

Then *Yaperikuli* went to where *Umawali's* rotting corpse lay. There were worms in it and *Yaperikuli* took one white and black worm and brought them back to the rapids below Hipana. Then he made people: a white man (*yalanawi*) and an Indian (*newiki*, people). He made a shot gun (*mukawa*) for each of them and said "who is going to keep this gun?" He gave it first to the Indian and said, "shoot". The Indian shot but missed. Then he gave it to the white man who shot and hit. *Yaperikuli* gave the gun to the white man and everything else to the white man. He left them where *Umawali* had rotted. Thus began the Whites; thus the Whites have all things. If the Indian had hit, all things would have been his.

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Summary

The Hohodene are a baniwa (Arawak-speaking) people living by the rivers in the Northeast of the Tukano region. Their mythology comprises three cycles: a primordial world where tribes of cannibalistic animals reign, succeeded by a second world where Yaperikuli, the hero-creator eliminates the chaos and introduces the basis of social order (birth, initiation, death), and then finally the last world where Yaperikuli puts in place the mechanisms allowing the culture to be perpetuated. The story of the anaconda Umawali or Uliamali, ancestor of the Whites and main water-spirit, belongs to the second cycle. Yaperikuli kills Uliamali when he discovers that his wife is having an affair with him. In agony, Uliamali releases his sperm, which gives life to the main fish species. Yaperikuli catches these fishes and brings them back to his wife who cooks them. When she realises that she is eating the sperm of her dead lover, she vomits. She only keeps down one fish, which she carries and giving birth to a new Uliamali. Yaperikuli, who has left his wife, kills him again. Wright shows that this myth does not concern adultery, as one might think, but the process of individual and collective reproduction among the Hohodene. The examination of post-natal shamanizing rituals during which the myth is recited allows him to specify the performative properties of mythic speech and to affirm the absolute necessity of taking into account the context of myth, viewing each myth as a systematic entity.

Resumen

Los Hohodene son un pueblo fluvial baniwa (arawak) del noroeste del área tukano. Su mitología comporta tres ciclos: un mundo primordial donde reinan tribus de animales caníbales, al que sigue un segundo mundo en el que Yaperikuli, el héroe creador, elimina el caos introduciendo las bases del orden social (nacimiento, iniciación, muerte), y finalmente el último mundo en el que Yaperikuli pone a punto los mecanismos que permiten perpetuar la cultura. La historia de la anaconda Umawali o Uliamali, antepasado de los Blancos y espíritu principal de las aguas, pertenece al segundo ciclo. Yaperikuli mata a Uliamali cuando se entera que su esposa le engaña con él. Al agonizar, Uliamali expulsa su semen, que da nacimiento a las principales especies de peces. Yaperikuli los pesca y los ofrece a su esposa, quien los cuece. Cuando se da cuenta que se está comiendo el semen de su amante muerto, vomita. No conserva más que un pez en su seno, al que da nacimiento bajo la forma de un nuevo Uliamali. Yaperikuli, que había abandonado a su esposa, le mata de nuevo. Wright demuestra que este mito no concierne el adulterio, como podríamos pensar, sino el proceso de reproducción individual y colectivo de los Hohodene. El examen del ceremonial chamánico postnatal durante el cual el mito es recitado, le permite especificar las propiedades óptimas de las parábolas míticas y de afirmar la absoluta necesidad de tener en cuenta el contexto y contemplar cada mito como una totalidad sistemática.